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SNIE 30-3-63  
Advance Copy of the Estimate  
15 May 1963.  
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*SPECIAL NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE*

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF A RENEWAL  
OF KURDISH HOSTILITIES

NOTE: This is an advance copy of the estimate as approved by the United States Intelligence Board. The printed text will be circulated within five days of this issuance.

Central Intelligence Agency

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*Submitted by the*  
**DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE**

*The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, Defense, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and NSA.*

*Concurred in by the*  
**UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD**

*on 15 May 1963. Concurring were the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; The Director, Defense Intelligence Agency; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.*

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## CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

15 May 1963

SUBJECT: SNIE 30-3-63: SOME IMPLICATIONS OF A RENEWAL OF KURDISH  
HOSTILITIES

## SUMMARY

A. If serious negotiations between the Iraqi Kurds and the Iraqi Government fail to get under way soon, renewed fighting is likely. However, the Iraqi armed forces would probably not be much more effective against the Kurds today than they were under Kassim. Such fighting could seriously threaten the floundering Baathist regime. The Soviets have given open endorsement to the Iraqi Kurds; they probably intend to agitate the issue and at least to lend political support to the rebellious Kurds. We do not believe the Soviets would get heavily committed to providing material help in any quantity unless there were also a Kurdish revolt in Iran which moved the entire conflict up to the USSR's borders.

B. The Iraqi Kurds are likely to avoid antagonizing Iran, at least until they gain their objectives in Iraq. Their desire to retain Iranian benevolence, the lack of respected Kurdish leaders in Iran, and the capabilities of the Iranian military seem likely to prevent serious trouble in Iran.

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C. If serious trouble should break out in Kurdish Iran, and if this should occur in concert with other disturbances, serious strains on the abilities of the Iranian military and security forces would occur. However, the Iranian Government could probably survive it, although such unrest would distract the Shah from his reforming efforts. Perhaps most important of all, a Kurdish uprising extending to the Iranian-Soviet border would enable the USSR to provide the Kurdish nationalist movement with important material as well as political support.

#### DISCUSSION

1. The three-month old truce in the fighting between the Government of Iraq and rebellious Kurds led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani is in danger of being broken. When Kassim was overthrown, the Kurds supported the Baathist revolutionary government in return for a promise of "autonomy within the Iraqi Republic," but attempts to negotiate the terms of this autonomy have gotten nowhere. The Kurdish leaders have presented, probably as an initial bargaining position, a series of demands verging on independence. The Baghdad Government, preoccupied with the problems of Arab unity and domestic administration, has delayed the initiation of serious negotiations. Each side suspects the other's good faith and has maneuvered to improve its military position. If serious negotiations fail to get under way in fairly short order, renewed fighting is likely.

- 2 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

2. Resumption of hostilities with the Kurds could threaten the floundering Baathist government. Despite its brave words -- and apparent belief in them -- that a month's campaign would be sufficient to break Kurdish resistance, there is little reason to believe that the Iraqi Army would be much more effective today against the tough, well-situated tribesmen than it was under Kassim. We would expect the Kurdish guerrillas to dominate the rugged mountain areas while the army controlled roads and major population centers through its superiority in transport, armor, and air power. Trouble in Kurdistan might encourage dissidence elsewhere in the country, especially in the cities, where the population blamed previous failures in Kurdistan on Kassim's ineptitude and are not conditioned to accept a new string of losses and casualties. Moreover, the Kurds have shown their capability to put major elements of the Iraq Petroleum Company's oil complex out of action and might choose to do so. Finally, there is always the possibility that a military group, dissatisfied at having to fight another dirty war in Kurdistan, might try to turn the Baathists out of office.

3. The Soviets are no longer caught in the sharp dilemma of trying to support Kassim as well as the Kurds. Having seen their advances under Kassim lost in the Baathist revolution, they have moved from guarded to open endorsement of Barzani. We do not rate very highly the chances that Soviet propaganda support will be translated into significant material

- 3 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

assistance. The 150 miles of rugged Turkish and Iranian territory between the Soviet Union and Iraq limit supply possibilities either to occasional couriers and pack animals or to airdrops involving violation of Turkish or Iranian airspace. We do not believe the Soviets would get heavily committed to providing material help in any quantity unless there were also a Kurdish revolt in Iran which moved the entire conflict up to the USSR's borders. However, they probably intend to agitate the issue as a means of putting pressure on the Baghdad Government, and we believe that the USSR will lend at least political support to further military or political moves by Barzani. Should hostilities be renewed, the Soviets might attempt to assist the Kurds by cutting off the supply of munitions and spare parts to the Iraqis.<sup>1/</sup>

4. In its thoughts of using force to subdue the Kurds, the Baghdad Government is hoping for cooperation from Turkey and Iran to seal the borders against movement of food and military supplies. Turkey, with its long-standing policy of rigorously controlling its own Kurdish population and its intense dislike of special status for any other Kurds, will probably be prepared to comply, despite its suspicions of the Arab unity movement. Iran, however, has an ambivalent attitude toward the Barzani movement. It is concerned that Kurdish successes in Iraq will breed unacceptable demands for political, social, and economic betterment among its own Kurdish

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<sup>1/</sup> For an estimate of the broader aspects of Soviet-Arab relations and the possible effects of the USSR's Kurdish policy, see NIE 11-6-63, "The Soviet Role in the Arab World," dated 16 April 1963.

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

population. At the same time the Shah is deeply suspicious of Arab nationalism. In particular, the formation of a new UAR worries him for fear it presages the appearance of Nasser on the banks of the Tigris.

5. In these circumstances, Iran is pursuing two somewhat inconsistent courses of action. It has recently given special attention to the economic development of its own Kurdish areas. The program is limited, but it includes land reform and permits the government to proclaim its interest in the Kurdish minority. Iran is also maintaining contact with Barzani's forces through the Iranian intelligence service and giving them some, probably quite limited, aid. If hostilities should resume in Iraq, the Iranian Government might make some gestures toward sealing its borders but we think it likely that it would maintain contact with Barzani and turn a half-blind eye at least to movements of food across the border.

6. The Iraqi Kurdish leaders, for their part, have been careful so far not to incite revolt within Iran. Barzani has good reason for doing his part to keep lines of supply from Iran open. While the Iraqi Army is incapable of penetrating his mountain bastion, it can inflict considerable hardship by imposing an economic blockade. Moreover, a Kurdish rebellion in Iran would bring the Iranian military into the scene and probably seriously hamper the Iraqi Kurds' own field of maneuver. Hence, we believe that Barzani, whatever may be his ultimate intentions as to an independent

- 5 -

S-E-C-R-E-T

S-E-C-R-E-T

Kurdish state, is likely to avoid antagonizing Iran, at least until he obtains his objectives within Iraq. However, Kurdish leadership is not monolithic and it is possible that tribes in Iran may revolt on their own, in which case the Iraqi Kurds would almost certainly feel obliged to give their Iranian brethren whatever support they could. As time goes on, and particularly if the Kurds win autonomy in Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds will almost certainly take some steps toward promoting similar autonomy for the Iranian Kurds. For the time being, however, the capabilities of the Iranian military, the lack of respected Kurdish leaders within Iran, and Barzani's attitude appear likely to prevent serious trouble in Iran.

7. If, however, serious unrest broke out in Iranian Kurdistan, there would be unfortunate consequences. Even an abortive Kurdish rebellion in concert with other disturbances, such as those of recent weeks in Fars Province, would impose serious strains on the abilities of the Iranian military and security forces. While the government could probably survive fairly widespread unrest in the country, such unrest would distract the Shah from his reforming efforts, impede the land reform program, and interfere with the Shah's plans for orderly elections this summer. Opposition elements in Teheran might try to use the situation to foment disorder. Perhaps most important of all, a Kurdish uprising extending to the Iranian-Soviet border would enable the USSR to provide the Kurdish nationalist movement important material as well as political assistance.

- 6 -

S-E-C-R-E-T